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# 04/07/1988 - EIU Committee Studies Classroom Learning And Creativity

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EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY  
Charleston, Illinois

news

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

EIU COMMITTEE STUDIES CLASSROOM LEARNING AND CREATIVITY

CHARLESTON, IL--Faculty priorities and learning resources are two of the main areas being examined by a special Eastern Illinois University faculty committee chaired by Dr. David Buchanan, chemistry department professor. Buchanan said his committee members are currently reviewing the results of a special faculty survey which was conducted in the fall.

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The survey was the combined effort of five separate committees currently engaged in an intensive year-long survey of EIU's undergraduate education.

"Our committee is trying to identify modifications of current programs and other improvements that can make us better teachers," explained Dr. Buchanan. "The surveys should help to give us valuable insight into this in-depth project. We want not only to find new ways to improve the learning climate but also to be able to put into practice some improvement suggestions we have had in the past."

He said both the return rate (more than 40 percent) and the faculty comments were excellent. "What we received were many constructive inputs which further document the dedication of our faculty," he said. The results revealed four prime concerns of the faculty.

"The prime concern of our people is the underfunded budget and how it affects their ability to serve our students. It is obvious our faculty salaries are too low and many are required to hold a part-time job to support their families.

"There is also widespread concern about the state of Eastern's Booth Library, in the lack of space, books, and professional journals. Although the collection was good in the early seventies, the rising price of scholarly books has priced Eastern out of much of the market. The faculty feels that our library

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is missing many essential up-to-date standard books required for undergraduate education. In addition, every department has had to cancel subscriptions they need."

He notes the library was expanded some time ago to serve 6,700 students....but Eastern's student population is now at 10,000. "Even if the collections are expanded, the problem will still exist," he continued. "There simply isn't enough space to use them. Although the faculty criticized the library facility, they had only the highest praise for the library faculty. The concensus was that they are doing a great job with what they have to work with."

A third major concern which surfaced in the survey is the lack of adequate instructional materials. This shortage is most acute in the areas of Sciences and Technologies. Buchanan said in some departments, sixteen faculty members may share a single typewriter. The physics department is still using WWII surplus equipment, and some equipment is so old that it's impossible to obtain replacement parts when problems occur.

Travel funds are also a serious concern, as many faculty are unable to attend regional/national meetings to keep up to date on the latest teaching methods, the best books, what's being taught, etc.

Buchanan also said all University Department chairs who have undergraduate students have been interviewed and the committee is reviewing the results. The concerns of these key faculty

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members are the same as those of the general faculty.

In addition, some of the chairs are concerned about space, both for their classrooms and for offices. With two to three faculty members now sharing some small offices, there is a definite negative effect on the counseling function (i.e. those students who need help the most are often reluctant to discuss their problem with other faculty members present). Buchanan says the Eastern faculty prides itself on helping students, so this problem is especially noteworthy.

Following interviews with the Deans of Eastern's colleges, to get a broader perspective (i.e. the need for faculty developments programs college-wide to help the faculty improve undergraduate education...through lectures, test writing, etc.), the committee hopes to identify where the deans would like to see their colleges in 5-10 years.

The committee will then recommend the most essential problem areas to the president for corrective action...those that will have the biggest payout for the most students.

Buchanan says the committee realizes that all actions cannot be done with limited state funds, that private grants or foundation monies may be necessary for a total program.

"Our committee," explained Dr. Buchanan, "is meeting once or twice a month and like the other committees is encouraging help from students and faculty and staff members to provide new ideas for the study."

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Dr. Buchanan added that his committee in its final report hopes to open new pathways for faculty members as they seek new methods to improve classroom presentations.

"We have many unmet needs at EIU," Dr. Buchanan stated. "Many of these items would contribute directly to improved classroom instruction.

"We have also discovered the extensive need for more word processors and computer terminals and more student instruction on the use of computers in obtaining data. In other fields we need to bring in more outside speakers, visiting lecturers, and artists.

"The sharing of all these ideas, both old and new, hopefully will lead Eastern to stronger undergraduate education."

Other members of the Faculty Priorities committee include Dr. James Brinkman, music; Dr. Donald Garner, speech communications; Dr. Judith Ivarie, special education; Dr. Michael Loudon, English; Dr. Edward Marlow, management and marketing; Angus Nesbit, library; and Dr. Tom Woodall, physical education.